Epidemiological studies of UK test veterans: II. Mortality and cancer incidence

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Abstract

An epidemiological study was set up in the 1980s of UK participants in the UK atmospheric nuclear weapons testing programme. A large cohort of test participants was established along with a closely matched comparison or control group. Three analyses of mortality and cancer incidence have been carried out. This review describes the development of the evidence on possible effects on test participants with especial emphasis on the most recent analysis. Other sources of evidence, particularly from studies of other groups of test participants, are also considered. It was concluded that overall levels of mortality and cancer incidence in UK nuclear weapons test participants were similar to those in a matched control group, and overall mortality was lower than expected from national rates. There was no evidence of an increased raised risk of multiple myeloma among test participants in recent years, and the suggestion in the first analysis of this cohort of a raised myeloma risk relative to controls is likely to have been a chance finding. There was some evidence of a raised risk of leukaemia other than chronic lymphatic leukaemia among test participants relative to controls, particularly in the early years after the tests. Whilst this could be a chance finding, the possibility that test participation caused a small absolute risk of leukaemia other than chronic lymphatic leukaemia cannot be ruled out.

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